

ACTION WHA-00

RELEASED IN PART
B1, 1.4(D)

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00
	ANHR-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	EB-00	EUR-00	VC-00	H-01
	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-00
	NSAE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	CAEX-00	PA-00	PM-00
	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	STR-00	USIE-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00	G-00
	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/006W				

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P 300932Z OCT 03
 FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3569
 INFO DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC PRIORITY
 DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY
 USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY
 NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
 USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY
 AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
 AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
 AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
 AMEMBASSY LIMA
 AMEMBASSY LISBON
 AMEMBASSY MADRID
 AMEMBASSY MEXICO
 AMEMBASSY QUITO
 AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003728

SENSITIVE

NSC FOR TSHANNON
 STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI
 STATE WHA/PPC (ROE); WHA/AND
 DOL FOR ILAB (PEREZ-LOPEZ)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/28/2013
 TAGS: PGOV, ELAB, PHUM, VE
 SUBJECT: INTIMIDATION AND RECRIMINATION SURROUND SIGNATURE
 DRIVES

Classified By: Political Counselor Abelardo A. Arias for Reasons 1.5(b)
 and (d)

Summary

 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
 REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN
 CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
 DECLASSIFY AFTER: 6 JUN 2027
 DATE/CASE ID: 08 MAR 2007 200503244

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1. (U) The National Election Council (CNE) issued a resolution on October 27 promising to investigate all allegations of intimidation intended to keep people away from the upcoming recall signature drives. This comes after the opposition and GOV traded accusations about intimidating possible signers. President Chavez started the recriminations October 17 when he said that a signature against him is a signature against Venezuela. Opposition figures surfaced allegations that the GOV was intimidating public employees and pro-Chavez politicians countered that opposition officials at the state and local level are doing the same. Similar recriminations over possible intimidation also arose over the issue of whether members of the armed forces can or should sign recall petitions. The GOV now denies it ever made such threats, but clearly it made its point. Unclear is what impact this will have on the recall effort. End summary.

CNE Puts Its Foot Down

2. National Election Council (CNE) issued a unanimous decision on October 27 that the CNE would investigate any illicit acts intended to intimidate those who would sign the petitions to recall President Hugo Chavez or national deputies. The CNE resolution came after ten days of accusations between the GOV and opposition leaders of threats toward public workers who might sign. CNE board member -- and supposed Chavez supporter -- Jorge Rodriguez called on the GOV and state and local governments on October 23 to respect the rights of all Venezuelans regardless of political affiliation.

Chavez Confident Of Opposition "Strike Out"

3. (U) During public remarks in recent days, Chavez compared the November 28 - December 1 signature drive that might lead to a recall vote against him to the "coup" against him in April 2002. Noting the opposition's subsequent failure to oust him during the December 2002 - January 2003 work stoppage, Chavez said on October 17 the opposition was about to experience "strike three" with the recall signature drive, known as the "Reafirmazo." He warned those who planned to sign to be aware that they were, in actuality, signing against Venezuela and the future. The name, identification number, and fingerprints of petition signers will be part of history, he said, adding that for "100 years" families of

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those who sign will have to live with it.

4. (U) Chavez denied on October 23 he had threatened anyone, claiming the opposition is merely preparing its appeal for when the Reafirmazo fails. Recalling his baseball analogy, he said the opposition is like a batter complaining that the pitching is too hard. He added that GOV intelligence services had detected plots by "radical fascist" elements of the opposition to disrupt the Reafirmazo with violence and cast blame on the GOV. Chavez said he had given orders to the security services to step up intelligence-gathering activities to prevent the attacks so that Venezuelans would be guaranteed their right to sign.

Opposition Cries Foul, Cites Retaliation

5. (U) In mid-October various opposition leaders alleged that the GOV is pressuring public sector employees not to participate in the Reafirmazo and retaliating against those who signed earlier petitions against Chavez. Brave People's Alliance (ABP) leader Antonio Ledezma on October 20 called for a criminal investigation of Chavez and Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel for making "blatant threats" against public sector employees. Tal Cual Editor Teodoro Petkoff related an incident of a teacher -- the spouse of one of the newspaper's photographers -- that had signed the earlier petition who was fired on "instructions from above."

6. (U) Union leaders denounced the alleged intimidation of government workers who might sign the recall referendum petition and the misuse of the information from earlier signature collections for political purposes by the government. Manuel Cova, secretary general of the anti-Chavez Confederation of Workers of Venezuela (CTV), asked the National Election Council board on October 23 to give assurances that the rights of workers to sign would be protected. The Chavez-leaning National Workers Union (UNT) also spoke out against the alleged GOV pressure, saying that, Chavista or no, it is unacceptable to judge a worker for his or her political beliefs.

7. (U) Pro-Chavez Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) Deputy William Lara countered the accusations alleging that Miranda state governor Enrique Mendoza and other opposition officials had made similar threats against state and local employees who might participate in the MVR's petition drive against

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numerous opposition officials. Lara encouraged employees who felt threatened by Mendoza to complain to the human rights ombudsman. Fatherland for All (PPT) secretary general Jose Alborno summed up the GOV position: "Their problem is that the people realize that the opposition is hurting the country and that their solution is to return to the past. The dilemma is not between socialism and capitalism but rather between progress and the past."

Can The Military Play?

8. (U) The debate over possible intimidation also hit another important sector of Venezuelan society -- the military. Pro-Chavez attorney general Isaias Rodriguez on October 20 countered the GOV position that members of the armed forces may not sign a recall petition against President Chavez. Rodriguez said that military officials may express their will by signing a petition against Chavez, but they may not promote or participate in the collection of signatures. However, chief of the army Gen. Jorge Garcia Carneiro said on October 25 he had instructed his soldiers that participating in the signature drive in anyway would violate military regulations against political activism. MVR deputy Luis Tascon suggested that if opposition officials were worried about military participation, they should seek a clarification from the Supreme Court (TSJ). GOV officials agreed that the military may participate in the resulting referendum, should the petition drives be successful. The Democratic Coordinating Committee urged the military not/not to sign, asserting that the government would use the evidence of their political sympathies against them.

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